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APPLICATION NO.	FILING DATE	FIRST NAMED INVENTOR	ATTORNEY DOCKET NO.	CONFIRMATION NO.
10/549,653	06/21/2006	Naohiro Tabata	15115/171001	6174
22511	7590	02/12/2009	EXAMINER	
OSHA LIANG L.L.P.			COUSO, JOSE L	
TWO HOUSTON CENTER				
909 FANNIN, SUITE 3500			ART UNIT	PAPER NUMBER
HOUSTON, TX 77010			2624	
			NOTIFICATION DATE	DELIVERY MODE
			02/12/2009	ELECTRONIC

Please find below and/or attached an Office communication concerning this application or proceeding.

The time period for reply, if any, is set in the attached communication.

Notice of the Office communication was sent electronically on above-indicated "Notification Date" to the following e-mail address(es):

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Office Action Summary	Application No.	Applicant(s)	
	10/549,653	TABATA ET AL.	
	Examiner	Art Unit	
	Jose L. Couso	2624	

-- The MAILING DATE of this communication appears on the cover sheet with the correspondence address --

Period for Reply

A SHORTENED STATUTORY PERIOD FOR REPLY IS SET TO EXPIRE 3 MONTH(S) OR THIRTY (30) DAYS, WHICHEVER IS LONGER, FROM THE MAILING DATE OF THIS COMMUNICATION.

- Extensions of time may be available under the provisions of 37 CFR 1.136(a). In no event, however, may a reply be timely filed after SIX (6) MONTHS from the mailing date of this communication.
- If NO period for reply is specified above, the maximum statutory period will apply and will expire SIX (6) MONTHS from the mailing date of this communication.
- Failure to reply within the set or extended period for reply will, by statute, cause the application to become ABANDONED (35 U.S.C. § 133). Any reply received by the Office later than three months after the mailing date of this communication, even if timely filed, may reduce any earned patent term adjustment. See 37 CFR 1.704(b).

Status

1) Responsive to communication(s) filed on 14 July 2006.

2a) This action is **FINAL**. 2b) This action is non-final.

3) Since this application is in condition for allowance except for formal matters, prosecution as to the merits is closed in accordance with the practice under *Ex parte Quayle*, 1935 C.D. 11, 453 O.G. 213.

Disposition of Claims

4) Claim(s) 2-14 and 16-20 is/are pending in the application.

4a) Of the above claim(s) _____ is/are withdrawn from consideration.

5) Claim(s) _____ is/are allowed.

6) Claim(s) 2-14 and 16-20 is/are rejected.

7) Claim(s) _____ is/are objected to.

8) Claim(s) _____ are subject to restriction and/or election requirement.

Application Papers

9) The specification is objected to by the Examiner.

10) The drawing(s) filed on _____ is/are: a) accepted or b) objected to by the Examiner.

Applicant may not request that any objection to the drawing(s) be held in abeyance. See 37 CFR 1.85(a).

Replacement drawing sheet(s) including the correction is required if the drawing(s) is objected to. See 37 CFR 1.121(d).

11) The oath or declaration is objected to by the Examiner. Note the attached Office Action or form PTO-152.

Priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119

12) Acknowledgment is made of a claim for foreign priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119(a)-(d) or (f).

a) All b) Some * c) None of:

1. Certified copies of the priority documents have been received.
2. Certified copies of the priority documents have been received in Application No. _____.
3. Copies of the certified copies of the priority documents have been received in this National Stage application from the International Bureau (PCT Rule 17.2(a)).

* See the attached detailed Office action for a list of the certified copies not received.

Attachment(s)

1) Notice of References Cited (PTO-892)

2) Notice of Draftsperson's Patent Drawing Review (PTO-948)

3) Information Disclosure Statement(s) (PTO/SB/08)
Paper No(s)/Mail Date 5/4/06, 5/23/06, 7/10/08.

4) Interview Summary (PTO-413)
Paper No(s)/Mail Date. _____.

5) Notice of Informal Patent Application

6) Other: _____.

1. 35 U.S.C. 101 reads as follows:

Whoever invents or discovers any new and useful process, machine, manufacture, or composition of matter, or any new and useful improvement thereof, may obtain a patent therefor, subject to the conditions and requirements of this title.

The USPTO "Interim Guidelines for Examination of Patent Applications for Patent Subject Matter Eligibility" (Official Gazette notice of 22 November 2005), Annex IV, reads as follows (see also MPEP 2106):

Descriptive material can be characterized as either "functional descriptive material" or "nonfunctional descriptive material." In this context, "functional descriptive material" consists of data structures and computer programs which impart functionality when employed as a computer component. (The definition of "data structure" is "a physical or logical relationship among data elements, designed to support specific data manipulation functions." The New IEEE Standard Dictionary of Electrical and Electronics Terms 308 (5th ed. 1993).) "Nonfunctional descriptive material" includes but is not limited to music, literary works and a compilation or mere arrangement of data.

When functional descriptive material is recorded on some computer-readable medium it becomes structurally and functionally interrelated to the medium and will be statutory in most cases since use of technology permits the function of the descriptive material to be realized. Compare *In re Lowry*, 32 F.3d 1579, 1583-84, 32 USPQ2d 1031, 1035 (Fed. Cir. 1994) (claim to data structure stored on a computer readable medium that increases computer efficiency held statutory) and *Warmerdam*, 33 F.3d at 1360-61, 31 USPQ2d at 1759 (claim to computer having a specific data structure stored in memory held statutory product-by-process claim) with *Warmerdam*, 33 F.3d at 1361, 31 USPQ2d at 1760 (claim to a data structure per se held nonstatutory).

In contrast, a claimed computer-readable medium encoded with a computer program is a computer element which defines structural and functional interrelationships between the computer program and the rest of the computer which permit the computer program's functionality to be realized, and is thus statutory. See *Lowry*, 32 F.3d at 1583-84, 32 USPQ2d at 1035.

2. Claims 16-18 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 101 because the claimed invention is directed to non-statutory subject matter as follows. Claims 16-18 define a computer program embodying functional descriptive material (i.e., a computer program or computer executable code). However, the claim does not define a "computer-readable medium or computer-readable memory" and is thus non-statutory for that reason (i.e., "When functional descriptive material is recorded on some computer-readable medium it becomes structurally and functionally interrelated to the medium and will be statutory in most cases since use of technology permits the function of the descriptive material to be realized" – Guidelines Annex IV). The scope of the presently claimed invention

encompasses products that are not necessarily computer readable, and thus NOT able to impart any functionality of the recited program. The examiner suggests amending the claim(s) to embody the program on “computer-readable medium” or equivalent; assuming the specification does NOT define the computer readable medium as a “signal”, “carrier wave”, or “transmission medium” which are deemed non-statutory (refer to “note” below). Any amendment to the claim should be commensurate with its corresponding disclosure.

Note:

“A transitory, propagating signal … is not a “process, machine, manufacture, or composition of matter.” Those four categories define the explicit scope and reach of subject matter patentable under 35 U.S.C. § 101; thus, such a signal cannot be patentable subject matter.” (In re Nuijten, 84 USPQ2d 1495 (Fed. Cir. 2007). Should the full scope of the claim as properly read in light of the disclosure encompass non-statutory subject matter such as a “signal”, the claim as a whole would be non-statutory. Should the applicant’s specification define or exemplify the computer readable medium or memory (or whatever language applicant chooses to recite a computer readable medium equivalent) as statutory tangible products such as a hard drive, ROM, RAM, etc, as well as a non-statutory entity such as a “signal”, “carrier wave”, or “transmission medium”, the examiner suggests amending the claim to include the disclosed tangible computer readable storage media, while at the same time excluding the intangible transitory media such as signals, carrier waves, etc.

Merely reciting functional descriptive material as residing on a “tangible” or other medium is not sufficient. If the scope of the claimed medium covers media other than “computer readable” media (e.g., “a tangible media”, a “machine-readable media”, etc.), the claim remains non-statutory. The full scope of the claimed media (regardless of what words applicant chooses) should not fall outside that of a computer readable medium.

3. 35 U.S.C. 101 reads as follows:

Whoever invents or discovers any new and useful process, machine, manufacture, or composition of matter, or any new and useful improvement thereof, may obtain a patent therefor, subject to the conditions and requirements of this title.

The USPTO “Interim Guidelines for Examination of Patent Applications for Patent Subject Matter Eligibility” (Official Gazette notice of 22 November 2005), Annex IV, reads as follows (see also MPEP 2106):

Descriptive material can be characterized as either "functional descriptive material" or "nonfunctional descriptive material." In this context, "functional descriptive material" consists of data structures and computer programs which impart functionality when employed as a computer component. (The definition of "data structure" is "a physical or logical relationship among data elements, designed to support specific data manipulation functions." The New IEEE Standard Dictionary of Electrical and Electronics Terms 308 (5th ed. 1993).) "Nonfunctional descriptive material" includes but is not limited to music, literary works and a compilation or mere arrangement of data.

When functional descriptive material is recorded on some computer-readable medium it becomes structurally and functionally interrelated to the medium and will be statutory in most cases since use of technology permits the function of the descriptive material to be realized. Compare *In re Lowry*, 32 F.3d 1579, 1583-84, 32 USPQ2d 1031, 1035 (Fed. Cir. 1994) (claim to data structure stored on a computer readable medium that increases computer efficiency held statutory) and *Warmerdam*, 33 F.3d at 1360-61, 31 USPQ2d at 1759 (claim to computer having a specific data structure stored in memory held statutory product-by-process claim) with *Warmerdam*, 33 F.3d at 1361, 31 USPQ2d at 1760 (claim to a data structure per se held nonstatutory).

In contrast, a claimed computer-readable medium encoded with a computer program is a computer element which defines structural and functional interrelationships between the computer program and the rest of the computer which permit the computer program's functionality to be realized, and is thus statutory. See *Lowry*, 32 F.3d at 1583-84, 32 USPQ2d at 1035.

4. Claims 2-14 and 19-20 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 101 because the claimed invention is directed to non-statutory subject matter as follows. Claims 2-14 and 19-20

appear to define an apparatus using “means plus function” claim language. However, the specification does not disclose corresponding physical structure associated with each claim element, and the specification does indicate that the invention may be embodied as pure software on page 28, lines 2-11. Therefore, the claim as a whole appears to be nothing more than a collection of software elements, thus defining functional descriptive material per se.

Functional descriptive material may be statutory if it resides on a “computer-readable medium or computer-readable memory”. The claim(s) indicated above lack structure, and do not define a computer readable medium and are thus non-statutory for that reason (i.e., “When functional descriptive material is recorded on some computer-readable medium it becomes structurally and functionally interrelated to the medium and will be statutory in most cases since use of technology permits the function of the descriptive material to be realized” – Guidelines Annex IV). The scope of the presently claimed invention encompasses products that are not necessarily computer readable, and thus NOT able to impart any functionality of the recited program. The examiner suggests:

1. Amending the claim(s) to embody the program on “computer-readable medium” or equivalent; assuming the specification does NOT define the computer readable medium as a “signal”, “carrier wave”, or “transmission medium” which are deemed non-statutory (refer to “note” below); or

2. Pointing out where the corresponding structure can be found in the specification that would clearly be indicative of a statutory apparatus, in a 112 6th paragraph sense.

Any amendment to the claim should be commensurate with its corresponding disclosure.

Note: “A transitory, propagating signal … is not a “process, machine, manufacture, or composition of matter.” Those four categories define the explicit scope and reach of subject matter patentable under 35 U.S.C. § 101; thus, such a signal cannot be patentable subject matter.” (*In re Nuijten*, 84 USPQ2d 1495 (Fed. Cir. 2007)).

Should the full scope of the claim as properly read in light of the disclosure encompass non-statutory subject matter such as a “signal”, the claim as a whole would be non-statutory. Should the applicant’s specification define or exemplify the computer readable medium or memory (or whatever language applicant chooses to recite a computer readable medium equivalent) as statutory tangible products such as a hard drive, ROM, RAM, etc, as well as a non-statutory entity such as a “signal”, “carrier wave”, or “transmission medium”, the examiner suggests amending the claim to include the disclosed tangible computer readable storage media, while at the same time excluding the intangible transitory media such as signals, carrier waves, etc.

5. The following is a quotation of the appropriate paragraphs of 35 U.S.C. 102 that form the basis for the rejections under this section made in this Office action:

A person shall be entitled to a patent unless –

(b) the invention was patented or described in a printed publication in this or a foreign country or in public use or on sale in this country, more than one year prior to the date of application for patent in the United States.

6. Claims 2-4, 10-11 and 16-19 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(b) as being anticipated by Hagiwara et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,816,611).

With regard to claim 2 Hagiwara describes area specifying means for specifying a area determined based on the a body portion of a person constituting an object in an image (see figure 6, element 61 and refer for example to column 6, line 62 through column 7, line 4); and an image generating means for generating an image subjected to the a gradation process as an image processing on a target area specified by the area specifying means (see figure 8, element 81 and refer to column 7, lines 42-59).

As to claim 3, Hagiwara describes wherein the target area specifying means includes a detection means for detecting the body portion of a person constituting an object in an image (see figure 6, element 61 and refer for example to column 6, line 62 through column 7, line 4); and a specifying means for specifying the target area based on the body portion detected by the detection means (see figure 8, element 84 and refer to column 9, lines 19-35).

With regard to claim 4, Hagiwara describes wherein the image generating means generates an image subjected to the image processing in an area within a target area specified by the target area specifying means, which area has a color component equal

or near to the main color (see figure 8, elements 82-83 and refer to column 8, line 51 through column 9, line 18).

As to claim 10, Hagiwara describes wherein the image generating means determines the contents of the image processing to be conducted, based on the size of the body portion constituting a reference of the target area specified by the target area specifying means (see figure 8, elements 82-84 and refer to column 8, line 51 through column 9, line 35).

In regard to claim 11, Hagiwara describes further comprising an element extraction means for extracting at least one element making up the body portion of a person constituting an object in an image to be processed, and included in the target area, wherein the image generating means conducts, in a limited way, the image processing of an element area determined based on the element extracted by the element extraction means (figure 8, elements 82-83 and refer to column 9, lines 9-18).

With regard to claim 16, Hagiwara describes a program for causing an information processing system to execute (see figure 16 and refer for example to column 10, lines 11-33) the step of specifying a target area determined based on the a body portion of a person constituting an object in an image (see figure 6, element 61 and refer for example to column 6, line 62 through column 7, line 4); and a step of generating an image subjected to the a gradation process for the target area specified (see figure 8, element 81 and refer to column 7, lines 42-59).

As to claim 17, Hagiwara describes wherein the image generating step causes the information processing system to generate an image subjected to the image processing based on the a skin color component of a person constituting an object, extracted from the body portion providing a reference of the target area specified (see figure 8, elements 82-83 and refer to column 8, line 51 through column 9, line 18).

In regard to claim 18, Hagiwara describes a program for causing an information processing system to execute (see figure 16 and refer for example to column 10, lines 11-33) a step of specifying a position and a range of an area including an arbitrary image in an image (see figure 6, element 61 and refer for example to column 6, line 62 through column 7, line 4); and a step of generating an image subjected to an image processing in an area having a color component equal or near to a main color component representing an area in the specified area (see figure 8, elements 82-83 and refer to column 8, line 51 through column 9, line 18).

With regard to claim 19, Hagiwara describes wherein the target area specifying means includes a detection means for detecting the body portion of a person constituting an object in an image (see figure 6, element 61 and refer for example to column 6, line 62 through column 7, line 4); and a specifying means for specifying the area based on the body portion detected by the detection means (see figure 8, element 84 and refer to column 9, lines 19-35).

7. The prior art made of record and not relied upon is considered pertinent to applicant's disclosure.

Fukui et al., Kim et al., Schneiderman et al., Steinberg and Segawa et al. all disclose systems similar to applicant's claimed invention.

8. Any inquiry concerning this communication or earlier communications from the examiner should be directed to Jose L. Couso whose telephone number is (571) 272-7388. The examiner can normally be reached on Monday through Friday from 6:30 to 3:00.

If attempts to reach the examiner by telephone are unsuccessful, the examiner's supervisor, Brian Werner, can be reached on (571) 272-7401. The fax phone number for the organization where this application or proceeding is assigned is (571) 273-8300.

Information regarding the status of an application may be obtained from the Patent Application Information Retrieval (PAIR) system. Status information for published applications may be obtained from either Private PAIR or Public PAIR. Status information for unpublished applications is available through Private PAIR only. For more information about the PAIR system, see <http://pair-direct.uspto.gov>. Should you have questions on access to the Private PAIR system, contact the Electronic Business Center (EBC) at 866-217-9197 (toll-free).

/Jose L. Couso/
Primary Examiner, Art Unit 2624
February 5, 2009